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Item 2 (a) of the provisional agenda*

PREPARATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT ON THE BASIS OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 44/228 AND TAKING INTO ACCOUNT OTHER RELEVANT GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS: ACTIVITIES OF THE CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT

Report of the Secretary-General of the Conference

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The fourth session of the Preparatory Committee of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development marks the culmination of nearly two years of preparatory work which commenced with the organizational session of the Preparatory Committee in March 1990 in New York. The work of the Preparatory Committee has progressed steadily from an initial discussion of organizational matters to the identification in more precise terms of the issues before the Conference at the first substantive session (Nairobi, 6-31 August 1991), followed by an in-depth discussion of issues and possible approaches to action at the second substantive session (Geneva, 18 March-5 April 1991). At the third session (Geneva, 12 August-4 September 1991), the Preparatory Committee began discussing the substantive outputs of the Conference. Significant progress was made at the third session on negotiating the contents of Agenda 21 with regard to the sectoral issues considered in Working Groups I and II. The Preparatory Committee agreed on a basic structure for the presentation of the programme of action in the form of

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* A/CONF.151/96.

Agenda 21 and identified the additional work required for further consideration of these issues. With regard to the cross-sectoral issues and the Earth Charter/Rio de Janeiro Declaration on Environment and Development, the discussions did not progress as far.

2. The principal task at the fourth and final session of the Preparatory Committee is the finalization of the proposals to be placed before the Conference for approval in June 1992. The Preparatory Committee has before it a compendium of proposals with regard to the Earth Charter, a similar compendium with regard to institutional proposals, specific proposals for action in all sectoral and cross-sectoral areas in the format for Agenda 21 specified by the Preparatory Committee and a background paper on finance. The proposals for Agenda 21 are based on the outcome of the third session of the Preparatory Committee and the specific instructions with regard to elaboration given at that session. They include a discussion of the means required for implementing the proposed activities in each area. A critically important component of these means is requirements for financing. These are based on preliminary estimates of costs in virtually all areas and cannot be regarded as constituting a budget. But it is hoped that these estimates will provide a guide for further discussion of the issue of financial resources. The Preparatory Committee also has before it a compilation of proposals received from countries with regard to different items in the agenda.

3. The tasks before the Preparatory Committee are clearly very substantial, but it is hoped that the format and content of the documentation provided will facilitate the process of arriving at an agreement on the proposals which should go before the Conference in June 1992. The secretariat hopes to provide a guide to Agenda 21 in order to highlight linkages and structure.

II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT

A. Work process

4. The principal task before the secretariat after the third session of the Preparatory Committee was the elaboration of Agenda 21 in the format specified by the Preparatory Committee. A major exercise in costing was required in the large number of programme areas which were under consideration. The cross-sectoral issues also had to be elaborated in the form of Agenda 21 proposals. The excellent support received by the secretariat from its partners in the United Nations system and elsewhere enabled it to complete this task. The working parties set up by the secretariat helped to bring to bear a wide range of expert opinion upon the formulation of Agenda 21. The Secretariat is deeply grateful to the members of the working parties and its partners in the United Nations system and elsewhere for the support that it has received.

5. A major event in the work process of the secretariat was The Hague Symposium on Sustainable Development: From Concept to Action, which was held from 25 to 27 November. This Symposium was organized by the secretariat in close cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the

Government of the Netherlands. The secretariat is deeply grateful to them for the continuous support that they extended to the process which led up to The Hague Symposium. The Symposium was chaired by Mr. Jan Pronk, Minister for Development Cooperation of the Government of the Netherlands, and Mr. Mahbub Ul-Haq, Special Adviser to the Administrator of UNDP. About 40 experts, drawn from all parts of the world and representing a variety of disciplines, discussed in specific terms the way in which the concept of sustainable development could be translated into operational policies and programmes. The discussions were based on research papers commissioned by the secretariat and a synthesis paper prepared by Ignacy Sachs of the Centre des Hautes Etudes of Paris. The synthesis paper and the statement which emerged from the Symposium are being made available to the Preparatory Committee for its information.

6. Several other events organized by the Conference secretariat, or in close collaboration with it, have also contributed greatly to the formulation and refinement of Agenda 21. The International Council of Scientific Unions and several other organizations joined together in arranging a major conference to define a science agenda for environment and development for the twenty-first century. This conference was held in Vienna from 25 to 29 November 1991 and brought together more than 200 scientists. The statement which emerged from the conference is available to the Preparatory Committee for information.

7. Another major event was the Workshop on the Applications of Biotechnology, organized by the secretariat and held in New Delhi from 23 to 25 October 1991. This workshop helped to shape the proposals contained in Agenda 21 for the biotechnology component.

8. In order to examine the intellectual property aspects of the transfer of environmentally sound technology, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) collaborated with the Conference secretariat in organizing a workshop in Geneva from 21 to 22 October 1991. This workshop was attended by about 16 experts, mainly from developing countries. The outcome of the workshop is also available to the Preparatory Committee for information.

9. In October 1991 the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) organized a major meeting on environmentally sustainable industrial development in Copenhagen. This meeting helped to distil what could be described as an industry agenda for sustainable development. The outcome of the conference is also available to the Preparatory Committee for information.

B. Regional activities

10. A report to the Preparatory Committee at its third session outlined the regional activities undertaken. Regional preparations have continued. The following is a brief update of events or actions taken after the third session.

11. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) supported the Arab Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development, held at Cairo from 10 to 12 September 1991. The report of ESCWA on the Arab Ministerial

Conference has been issued in document A/CONF.151/PC/99. The areas of strategic action for the 1992 Conference, as determined by the Arab Ministerial Conference, covered the need for financial resources, the role of national and international institutions, international treaties and technology transfer, the challenges posed by population growth, the effect of war, building of environmental awareness, strengthening environmental legislation and rationalizing the use of energy.

12. The second African Regional Preparatory Conference on Environment and Development was held at Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from 11 to 14 November 1991. The meeting was sponsored by the Economic Commission for Africa and the Organization of African Unity, African Development Bank, UNDP/United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office, United Nations Environment Programme and the Conference secretariat. It concluded successfully after consolidating and adopting the African Common Position on Environment and Development. From the documentation it is clear that Africa attaches great importance to the Conference and its expectations are high. The African Common Position paper makes it clear that poverty remains the major reason for the challenges that sustainable development raises. Other important obstacles are the foreign debt burden, weak commodity trade and unsatisfactory and poor transfer of appropriate and environmentally sound technologies.

13. The Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) countries have also submitted a report which highlights the need for the countries concerned to make a series of simultaneous and linked demographic, economic, technological, social, participatory and institutional transitions in order to put them securely on a sustainable development path.

14. The Pacific island developing countries held a workshop in Vanuatu, from 21 to 23 October, on the South Pacific preparations for the Conference. Their input will highlight the special nature of this vast region and the need to support the inhabitants of the numerous small island countries in their role as custodians of the largest ocean on Earth.

15. Preparations are also under way between the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries, although no report had been received by the secretariat as of January 1991.

16. Document A/CONF.151/PC/100/Add.26 elaborates further the secretariat's view concerning regional cooperation requirements. The regional commissions of the United Nations have also separately provided information about their potential role in implementing Agenda 21.

C. National preparation and reports

17. The official deadline for submission of national reports was 31 July 1991. Regretfully only 15 countries submitted reports in final or final-draft form by that date. The secretariat extended the deadline unofficially to the end of October. Owing to documentation deadlines and limitations on staff resources, the secretariat subsequently decided on a

cut-off date of 21 November for all national reports. By that date the secretariat had received 71 national reports and two subregional reports, totalling approximately 11,000 pages. Some 45 per cent of the developing countries as a whole submitted national reports, 55 per cent of the least developed countries, 41 per cent of the industrialized countries and 70 per cent of the former Central and Eastern European centrally planned economies. These reports form the basis for a brief synthesis report entitled "Overview of national reports" (A/CONF.151/PC/98).

18. From the reports it is clear that most Governments have gone to great lengths in having their reports prepared and, in submitting their reports, a number of Governments, either officially or unofficially, have expressed to the secretariat their particular enthusiasm about the preparatory process, which in many countries, has included a number of non-governmental entities such as industry and women's groups, universities and the like. This approach was suggested by the Preparatory Committee in its guidelines, and it is gratifying that this kind of consultative process has surrounded many of the national level preparations. Governments have quite often arranged seminars and public information meetings, and these have been useful tools at this stage of the awareness-building process.

19. The presence of a UNDP/UNCED resident representative, supported financially, appears to have greatly expedited the process in developing countries. Interestingly a number of developed countries have seen delays in the report preparations, resulting from an exhaustive, and sometimes perhaps unexpected, consultative process.

20. Needless to say, the time given for the analysis of national reports has been far too short and the secretariat will continue to receive and review national reports up until the Conference. The total number of reports, according to information given to the secretariat, should exceed 100, totalling in the order of 20,000 pages. This vast amount of information, as well as the processes that have gone into the preparation of the reports, should be preserved and strengthened in an appropriate manner.

D. External relations

1. Cooperation with United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations

21. The effective pattern of cooperation which has been set in train within the United Nations system to prepare for the Conference has considerably strengthened the efforts of the secretariat in putting together the extensive documentation required for the final session of the Preparatory Committee. The continuing and close involvement of United Nations organizations, programmes and bodies has been as before, exceptionally supportive.

22. System-wide preparations for the Conference figured prominently on the agenda of the Administrative Committee on Coordination in October 1991 and April 1992 and two sessions of the Designated Officials on Environmental

Matters in September 1991 and February 1992. The secretariat closely followed the discussions at meetings of the governing bodies of various United Nations and related organizations, such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (end of 1991), the International Atomic Energy Agency (September), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (October/November) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (November), as well as the 10th World Forestry Congress (September), organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and the UNIDO international meeting on ecologically sustainable industrial development (October).

23. The inter-sessional period was marked by other intergovernmental meetings which had an important bearing on and provided guidance and input to the Conference preparations. These included the Commonwealth Heads of Government in Harare (October), the Second African Regional Preparatory Conference on Environment and Development in Abidjan, the Francophone summit in Paris, both in November 1991, the ministerial session of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in December, the summit meeting of the Islamic States, the meeting of Environmental Ministers of the developing countries, in Malaysia in April, and others. Most were attended by the Secretary-General of the Conference or his representatives. These meetings, as well as official visits made by the Secretary-General of the Conference at the invitation of a number of Governments, have benefited considerably the substantial work carried out by the secretariat.

24. The secretariat maintained close working relationships with the Permanent Missions in Geneva, New York and Nairobi through regular briefings and other contacts, with the New York office assuming a larger role before the final meeting of the Preparatory Committee.

2. Non-governmental organizations

Youth involvement

25. Some youth ambassadors have been nominated, who are in charge of supporting the Secretary-General in disseminating information to the younger generation and raising the awareness of decision makers on the main issues of concern in this important sector of society. The secretariat is actively involved in numerous youth initiatives for the Conference, particularly the World Youth Forum to be held in Costa Rica in March 1992. A coordinated effort is under way to incorporate the input and recommendations of youth to the Conference.

Participation of non-governmental organizations in the preparatory process

26. An increasing number of non-governmental organizations from all regions are participating in the discussion process leading to the Conference. The number of accredited non-governmental organizations has grown from 350 to over 1,000. The proportion from the South has reached nearly 40 per cent of the total.

27. Important documents have been produced as a result of regional and global conferences and technical work. Indigenous peoples and women, scientists, professional groups and non-governmental organizations concerned with the environment and development have sent their resolutions and recommendations.

28. A significant number of representatives of non-governmental organizations are expected to be present in New York during the fourth session of the Preparatory Committee. The secretariat will provide basic facilities, such as meeting rooms, secretarial support, office equipment and communications.

29. In order to facilitate the input of the non-governmental organizations into the official process, some workshops will take place on the main issues under consideration, and some mechanisms will be established to link the official and non-governmental organization processes.

Contribution of women

30. Several major events on issues related to women and the environment have taken place in different parts of the world. The Global Assembly of Women and the Environment and Women in a Healthy Planet (November 1991) deserve special recognition for the substantive and world-wide representation in their discussions.

Contribution of indigenous peoples

31. The representation of indigenous peoples has also increased, as has their interest in having their voices heard during the official preparatory meetings. Papers reflecting their views on specific technical issues, such as biodiversity, technology transfer and land use, as well as on the need to review present development patterns, have been greatly appreciated by the secretariat. In addition, the indigenous peoples of Brazil are preparing several events that will emphasize the virtues and values of their style of life.

Third World Participation Fund

32. With the support of Canada, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway and the United States of America, this Fund will continue to operate during the fourth session of the Preparatory Committee and the Conference. At least 100 participants from the South will be able to attend the fourth session through this Fund.

Other funding for non-governmental organizations

33. The Ford Foundation, the Mott Foundation, World Wildlife Fund International, the Rockefeller Foundation and Ecofund have been strong supporters of the whole non-governmental organization operation and the specific services and activities which the secretariat has been able to provide during the preparatory process.

3. Public information activities

34. The programme of public information for the Conference is carried out in close cooperation with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations secretariat, to which budgetary resources were allocated for this purpose.

35. A Conference media and information office is attached to the Geneva secretariat, and a second one has been created in connection with the New York office. A new series of background booklets has been developed. They appear under the title "Earth Summit Publications" and cover basic reference and question-and-answer material, as well as selected speeches. Some are available in French and Spanish. The "Earth Summit News" has been revised and now appears more frequently, in the form of loosely assembled fact sheets with news stories, features and updates on various Conference and other environment and development activities.

36. In December the Earth Pledge was officially launched during a special ceremony at the United Nations in New York. A number of United Nations organizations assist in the distribution of the Pledge. A special effort is maintained to encourage media and public organizations to participate in its promotion.

37. Robert Rauschenberg, the American artist, has created a special painting, unveiled at the Earth Pledge ceremony, entitled "Last Turn, Your Turn". The poster produced of this painting has become the offical Conference poster.

38. The Hague Symposium, a conference of non-governmental organizations in Paris and the International Conference on Water and the Environment, held at Dublin, were covered by the media and information office, with special emphasis on developing and reinforcing contacts with journalists.

39. Numerous print, film, music and other promotional projects have been completed or are in progress, either in cooperation with partners in other United Nations organizations or with independent producers/promoters.

E. Information system

40. The dissemination of information produced at the Conference via electronic means has increased considerably. Increasing numbers of delegations, as well as non-governmental organizations and partners in United Nations organizations are using this method for fast access to Conference information.

41. In the secretariat a number of efforts have been under way to present the information contained in Agenda 21, as well as in the national reports, in other than printed form. A database has been developed, which allows rapid access to the contents of Agenda 21, by programme area, objective, activity and a number of other descriptors. This database is available to delegations

at the fourth session of the Preparatory Committee. Additional tools are also being developed to make the use of this database simpler for those who do not have computer experience. Prototypes are also available at the fourth session and a final version will be available by June 1992.

42. The secretariat is also putting together a plan to support the Conference with sophisticated computerized registration, communications and other office automation facilities. Negotiations are now under way with suppliers of hardware and information technology in this regard, and a detailed report will be made available at the fourth session in an information document.

43. Plans are well under way for setting up a communications and information system to support the non-governmental organizations, both at the official site and at the Global Forum. This activity is being led by Ibase/AlterNex, a Brazilian non-governmental organization. The non-governmental organization facility will be fully connected to the facility at the official Conference site to ensure appropriate communications between the two.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES: VOLUNTARY AND TRUST FUNDS

A. Voluntary Fund for Supporting Developing Countries in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and its Preparatory Process

44. The General Assembly, in its resolutions 45/211 and 45/248 A of 21 December 1990 decided that payment should be made from the Voluntary Fund for the travel expenses of representatives of the developing countries and, on an exceptional basis, that a daily subsistence allowance should be paid to representatives of the least developed countries to enable them to participate fully and effectively in the Conference and its preparatory process. A number of Governments have contributed to the Fund and these resources were utilized to fund the participation of developing countries at previous sessions of the Preparatory Committee. As at 31 October 1991, $1,500,000 had been pledged or contributed to the Voluntary Fund and utilized as follows:

	United States dollars
Amount contributed/pledged	1 500 000
Total used at first, second and third sessions of the Preparatory Committee	1 000 000
Balance available as at 31 October	500 000
Amount required for the fourth session of the Preparatory Committee	700 000
Balance (shortfall)	(200 000)
Amount required for Conference	500 000
Overall shortfall	(700 000)

45. As indicated, the Voluntary Fund as at 31 October had a balance of $500,000 as against the $700,000 required to finance the participation of the developing countries at the present session. The funds will be utilized on a first-come first-served basis until they are exhausted. In addition, the cost of financing the participation of the same countries at the Conference is estimated at $500,000, for which there is no funding at present.

46. The Voluntary Fund has fully proved its usefulness by permitting an increasing number of developing countries to participate in the Preparatory Committee. Those requesting funding increased from only 30 at the first session, in Nairobi, to 115 at the third session, in Geneva. In view of the importance of the issues being discussed by the Preparatory Committee and the Conference, it is expected that approximately 140 countries will seek funding. It will be a great disappointment for them and very damaging to the principle of universality of the Conference if, at this late stage, the representation of all countries cannot be ensured at the current session of the Preparatory Committee and at the Conference itself.

B. Trust Fund for Preparatory Activities for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

47. The other fund from which resources have been made available to enable the secretariat to carry out a number of programme activities in support of the preparatory process is the Trust Fund for Preparatory Activities for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

48. Current records show that an amount of $10,970,000 was contributed or pledged to the Fund as at 31 October 1991, out of which it was expected that expenditures of $6,400,000 would be incurred by the end of 1991. The exact level of expenditure will be known in February 1992, following the closure of the accounts of the biennium 1990-1991. Meanwhile, it is estimated that there will be a balance of $4,570,000, from which to finance the activities of the secretariat only through May, as a result of the heightened level of expenditure arising from the intensification of pre-Conference activities.

49. Furthermore, it should be noted that the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session approved the continuation of secretariat activities in 1992 until 30 September and the retention of a small core of staff until 31 December. It has authorized funding of $3.3 million from the regular budget for this purpose. However, this is in support only of that part of the Conference work programme funded from the regular budget. The recognition by the General Assembly of the need for post-Conference activities should also be extended to the part of the Conference work programme funded from voluntary contributions. That expenditure having been estimated at $5.5 million, the Trust Fund for Preparatory Activities will need additional contributions of $1 million to provide enough resources to carry out post-Conference activities until 30 September 1992.

50. Thus, the Voluntary Fund and the Trust Fund for Preparatory Activities are in need of additional contributions in the amounts of $700,000 and $1 million, respectively. The secretariat is grateful to the countries whose contributions have enabled it thus far to carry out many of the preparatory activities. The secretariat appeals once more to their generosity, as well as to those countries that have not yet contributed to the Voluntary Fund but are in a position to help, to consider making a contribution to make up for the shortfall in the two funds and to fulfil, in a proper and timely manner, the mandate of the Conference.

51. Final needs will depend on the decisions of the Preparatory Committee at its fourth session and on the recommendations of the Conference itself.

The countries from which contributions and pledges have so far been received for the Voluntary Fund and the Trust Fund are listed below:

Status of the Voluntary and Trust Funds as at end July 1991

Donor	Voluntary Fund		Trust Fund for Preparatory Activities	
	Pledge	Contribution	Pledge	Contribution
	(US dollars)		(US dollars)	
Member States				
Austria	-	50 000	73 700	78 600
Canada	75 000	50 000	644 000	381 000
Cyprus	-	500	-	-
Denmark	100 000	-	-	25 000
Finland	-	200 000	-	482 000
France	-	50 000	-	-
Italy	-	-	-	235 600
Japan	110 000	-	1 390 000	-
Myanmar	-	500	-	-
Netherlands	-	100 000	-	1 428 000
Norway	-	300 000	-	955 000
Singapore	-	50 000	-	-
Sweden	-	200 000	-	3 000 000
Switzerland	47 000	-	54 000	-
United Kingdom	-	55 000	18 500	242 500
Others				
Business Council for Sustainable Development	-	-	-	20 500
European Community	20 000	100 000	-	-
ECOFUND-92	-	-	500 000	222 500
Ito Yokado	-	-	-	200 000
UNDP	-	-	200 000	100 000
UNFPA	-	-	-	265 700
UNIFEM	-	-	190 000	249 600
UNICEF	-	-	-	14 000
Total	352 000	1 156 000	3 070 200	7 900 000

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52. Contributions in the form of funds, equipment or staff services in support of the activities of the Trust Fund have also been pledged by or received from the Government of Canada, the Rockefeller Foundation, ECOFUND-92, the Ito Yokado Chain Store of Japan, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), the Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

53. Some corporations and agencies have contributed funds and services through ECOFUND-92 in support of the Conference. To date they are as follows: American Conservation Association, Asahi Glass Foundation, Atlantic Richfield Corporation, Ford Foundation, German Marshall Fund, International Institute for Sustainable Development, MacArthur Foundation, Minnesota Manufacturing and Mining Corporation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Organization for Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement International, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rockefeller Foundation.

54. The special fund for the activities of non-governmental organizations has received contributions/pledges of $100,000 from Canada, $50,000 from Denmark, $25,000 from Norway and $30,000 from the Ford Foundation.

55. A contribution of $A 100,000 has been committed by the Government of Australia to the South Pacific Regional and Environment Programme in support of the participation of countries of the Pacific area in the Conference process.